Remarks at the White House Millennium Lecture With Stephen Hawking

March 6, 1998

The President. Thank you very much. And Dr. Hawking, you'll have to forgive me, I'm a little hoarse. I hope for some genetic improvement sometime in the next year or so. [*Laughter*]

Ladies and gentlemen, this was a stunning event for me and, I hope, for all of you. Yesterday Stephen and Elaine came by the White House to see Hillary and me and, as you can imagine, like Hillary, I had reread ''A Brief History of Time,'' and I was utterly terrified—[*laughter*]—that he would say something like, you know, ''I went to University College Oxford, too,'' and then he would ask me some incredible comparative academic question about our experiences there. Instead, he said, ''Was the food just as bad when you were there?''—[*laughter*]—which was a wonderful relief. [*Laughter*]

Albert Einstein once said, because politics is for the present, but an equation is something for eternity, equations were more important than politics. I don't know about the politics part, but Professor Hawking's insights into equations have altered our notions of time and the very nature of eternity itself. Tonight he's given us a lot to think about, even the ability to imagine a future in which we as humans will have finally captured the ''Holy Grail of physics,'' reconciling the infinitesimal with the infinite, presenting the world with the ultimate theory of everything. Now, when a physicist does that, he can totally ignore politics and buy a newspaper. [*Laughter*]

The one thing I liked most about thinking about the future in Professor Hawking's term is that even when we reach the era of ''Star Trek,'' which will make a lot of our children very happy, it won't be so static. It will still be human and dynamic. And according to the visuals accompanying the lecture, it will still matter whether you can bluff at poker, which is encouraging. [*Laughter*]

I want to get on with the questions now. And again, I want to thank Professor Hawking for the extraordinary clarity and vigor of his presentation and for sharing his time with us tonight, and for placing this particular moment in the larger spectrum of time—which I think if we all could do more and more clearly every day, we would live happier, more productive lives.

Thank you, Professor.

Ellen, would you like to take over and bring in the questions?

[*At this point, the question-and-answer part of the lecture proceeded.*]

The President. Dr. Hawking, our position is we have repealed that law. [*Laughter*]

Let me say, first of all, in defense of my Vice President, you will all understand that he would love to be here, but there is a peculiar gravitational force in New Hampshire that manifests itself with a remarkable regularity. [*Laughter*] Let me also say that in the visual presentation accompanying Dr. Hawking's lecture, there was that remarkable project stamped ''canceled'' on it. This administration opposed the cancellation of it, I'm proud to say. [*Laughter*] But we hope that the Swiss project will take up the slack.

There's so many questions I know you would all like to ask. We have hundreds of questions coming in, and one of the questions I wish there were time to explore is, if we do, in fact, acquire a general understanding that time and space are more multidimensional than we had imagined, and computers become ever more sophisticated, even if people will never be able to travel at the speed of light, will we be able to communicate some day in some ways that destroy our common notions of time?

I've thought about it a lot, and I'm not smart enough to know what the answer is,

but I'd love to—that's one of the reasons I enjoyed re-reading the book.

Let me also say one other thing to close—since our Nobel laureate talked about his faith about how the world began—the First Lady started tonight by talking about the marvels of technology which enable this astonishing man to communicate with us. And it is true that he is here, and we did this because of the marvels of technology. It is also true, in my mind, that he is a genuine living miracle because of the power of the heart and the spirit. And we can only hope that all the advances that he has foreseen for us tonight in human knowledge will serve to amplify the heart and the spirit that we have humbly witnessed this evening.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:17 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Elaine Hawking, wife of Stephen W. Hawking, Lucasian professor of mathematics at Cambridge University, who gave the second lecture in the Millennium series; Ellen Lovell, Director, White House Millennium Council; and William D. Phillips, 1997 Nobel laureate in physics. The President also referred to the canceled superconducting super collider project. Professor Hawking, who suffers from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease, spoke with the aid of a computerized voice synthesizer. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

The President's Radio Address

March 7, 1998

Good morning. Since I took office I've done everything in my power to protect our children from harm. We've worked to make their streets and their schools safer, to give them something positive to do after school and before their parents get home. We've worked to teach our children that drugs are dangerous, illegal, and wrong. This week we took a major step to protect our children, indeed all Americans, from the dangers of drunk driving by proposing bipartisan legislation to lower the legal limit to .08 in every State.

Today I want to talk to you about the historic opportunity we now have to protect our Nation's children from an even more deadly threat: smoking. Smoking kills more people every day than AIDS, alcohol, car accidents, murders, suicides, drugs, and fires combined. Nearly 90 percent of those smokers lit their first cigarette before they turned 18.

Today, the epidemic of teen smoking is raging throughout our Nation as, one by one, our children are lured by multimillion dollar marketing schemes designed to do exactly that. Consider this: 3,000 children start to smoke every day illegally, and 1,000 of them will die sooner because of it. This is a national tragedy that every American should be honor-bound to help prevent.

For more than 5 years we've worked to stop our children from smoking before they start, launching a nationwide campaign with the FDA to educate them about the dangers of smoking, to reduce their access to tobacco products, and to severely restrict tobacco companies from advertising to young people. But even this is not enough to fully protect our children.

To put an end to the epidemic, Congress must act. Last fall I called on Congress to put aside politics and pass comprehensive bipartisan legislation to reduce teen smoking by raising the price of cigarettes by up to a dollar and a half a pack over the next 10 years, imposing strong penalties if the tobacco industry keeps selling cigarettes to our children, affirming the FDA's full authority to regulate tobacco, to prevent children's access to tobacco products, and to restrict tobacco ads aimed at young people, so that our children can't fall prey to the deadly threat of tobacco. Now, we learned last month that if we do this, we'll cut teen smoking by almost half over the next 5 years. That means if we act now, we have it in our power to stop 3 million children from smoking and to save a million lives as a result.

Today there are as few as 70 working days left before this Congress adjourns. On every one of those days, 1,000 adults will die from smoking. On every one of those days, 3,000 children will light their first cigarettes. On every one of those days, this Congress has the opportunity to stop it.

Will this Congress be remembered for putting politics aside and protecting our children from tobacco or for letting the public health opportunity of a lifetime pass us by?